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ABSTRACT

Academic alliances, local cooperative groups of teachers of languages and literatures at all levels, meet regularly to discuss current developments in language teaching, explore particular problems and find solutions to them, and help faculty take responsibility for their intellectual and professional lives. Membership can range from 20 to 100 professionals in several or many institutions. Despite the diverse needs, concerns, and composition of individual alliances, each works for the mutual professional development of its membership and the promotion of foreign language and literature education. They have coordinated and implemented a variety of programs, including short immersion programs, visits by native speakers, exchanges of teaching techniques and materials, exploration of new technologies and resources, teacher fellowships, community awareness and support efforts, and initiatives for state program improvement. New alliances continue to form, while more established groups undertake more ambitious projects. Steps in forming alliances include identifying interested faculty, establishing a steering committee, establishing a collaborative group, and holding meetings for discussion and elaboration. Administrator participation can be crucial to an alliance's success by providing logistical and material support and incentives for participation. A variety of resources are available for forming alliances. (MSE)

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ACADEMIC ALLIANCES
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

ERIC Q&A

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Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures

Prepared by Ellen S. Silber

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What are Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures?

Academic alliances in foreign languages and literatures are local alliances or cooperative groups of faculty members who teach modern and classical languages and literatures in elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. These faculty meet monthly or bimonthly in local, on-going collaborative groups to become each other's mentors and to share knowledge and teaching techniques in their disciplines. The establishment of these local alliances is facilitated by a national networking organization called Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures, located at Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York.

In each local alliance, members meet together to discuss the latest developments in the rapidly changing field of foreign language teaching and learning; to explore particular problems affecting the institutions represented by the alliance and find creative solutions to them; and for faculty to take collective responsibility for the practice of their profession and the improvement of the quality of their intellectual and professional lives.

Membership of an academic alliance in foreign languages and literatures can range from 20 to over 100 professionals from all educational levels; one collaborative or alliance may represent from three to over 20 educational institutions. The common focus of all alliances is collaboration, but each group preserves its unique character based on its location and particular needs.

For example, a county in eastern Kentucky has just established the Eastern Kentucky Collaborative, an alliance that links the few county high school foreign language teachers in that area. One of the major challenges faced by these teachers, besides their small number and the great distance between their schools, is the severe winter weather conditions. Because schools often close for as long as one month during the heaviest snow periods, the collaborative is developing learning packets for the students who miss those school days.

Members of the Greater Boston Collaborative have needs quite different from their colleagues in Eastern Kentucky. Located in a densely populated urban area known for its intellectual resources, this group's membership derives from elite institutions as well as

state-supported ones, from inner city school districts as well as from affluent suburban school systems. The issues of concern are as diverse as maintaining a foreign language presence in the central city school, and preparing large numbers of college-bound students from the affluent areas. In the latter case, communication between teachers from the schools and representatives from area colleges is of vital importance.

Despite the diverse needs and concerns of individual alliances throughout the country, each one works for the mutual professional development of its membership and the promotion of foreign language and literature education, regardless of size, location, or types of institutions represented. Indeed, members of academic alliances identify and address common goals, and communication takes place on the basis of long-term relationships rather than in brief encounters at state and national meetings (Thomas, 1986).

What Do Alliances Do?

Alliances across the country have implemented, developed, and coordinated a variety of programs based on issues and concerns in foreign languages and literatures education. Groups across the country have held immersion days and weekends and have brought native speakers from other countries to U.S. campuses for a week of intensive talks with Americans teaching their languages. Groups have also held formal sessions on exchange of teaching techniques and resource materials. Some schools with small budgets are now able to share in the riches of others who have superior foreign language resource centers with computer software, video, audio programs and language laboratory facilities.

Some alliances have explored together the use of new technologies—the use of the microcomputer in foreign language teaching and the availability of software in a variety of languages. Others have looked into video and how it can be used to enhance the teaching and learning process. Still others have devoted sessions to demonstrations of various methodologies in foreign language teaching: the Dartmouth Intensive Language Model, the Silent Way, and Total Physical Response (TPR). Many groups have held workshops on proficiency testing and teaching.

A frequent activity for some alliances at the

beginning of each meeting is a review by several group members of books, journals, and abstracts of important works relating to foreign languages, literatures, and cultures. Members also act as resources for each other in relating what they have learned at various conferences one or another might have attended.

An important role that Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures has played since 1985 has been the local administration of the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships Program for Foreign Language Teachers in the High Schools. Local alliances in conjunction with the central office for the Rockefeller program at the University of Pennsylvania are responsible for publicizing the program in their local area and creating a board to nominate prospective fellows from among those who submit proposals. A large number of collaboratives took on this responsibility for the 1986 fellowships and reviewed 474 applications; many groups participated as well in the 1987 program.

Academic alliances are building local communities of support for foreign language teaching and learning. A number have drawn up schedules of exchange visits among institutions and have arranged for guest teaching positions across academic sectors. Alliance members at schools and colleges have worked with administrators at all levels to improve and expand the teaching of foreign languages and literatures in their communities. One group, through its contacts with administrators, helped to revive the teaching of German at a local high school. Another recommended to the assistant superintendent of schools in a county in Virginia that foreign languages be introduced in the junior high schools in that county—an effort that proved successful!

Still other groups have worked to increase community awareness of the importance of foreign language learning and the need for its expansion. Several collaboratives—notably those in Albuquerque, NM and Ft. Wayne, IN—have had outstanding foreign language fairs, attracting more than 1000 participants for a day of events related to foreign language education. Albuquerque's *WE ARE THE WORLD...Can You Speak Our Language?* drew over 1200 students, teachers, parents, representatives of government, and members of the media in 1987.

The Ohio Valley Foreign Language Association drew up a detailed list of recommendations for improvements in foreign language education that was sent to the chief state school officer of Ohio as well as to superintendents and principals throughout the state. Members of the collaborative also presented these recommendations at a session of the Ohio Foreign Language Teachers Association.

Examples of activities held at the annual meetings of a number of alliances are described below.

1. Members gave a joint presentation on "Teaching/Learning Intensive Spanish/French" from the perspectives of the teacher and the student. (Cleveland Language Association, OH)
2. Members invited area guidance counselors to their meeting to share with them the strengths and potential of

local foreign language programs. (Albuquerque Language Teachers Association, NM)

3. Two teachers from Walpole High School, MA shared their experiences rewriting the French curriculum in view of the Oral Proficiency Guidelines with other members of the Greater Boston Collaborative.

4. "The New National Agenda in Education: The Professionalization of Teaching," moderated by a college president, featured a dialogue between superintendents and administrators from public and independent schools and teachers of foreign languages from member schools. (Tarrytown-Lakeland, NY Foreign Language Teachers' Association)

5. Participants shared their favorite textbooks as well as copies of their own favorite "creative" unit or semester exam used to assess students' progress. (Berks County, PA, Foreign Language Alliance for the Strengthening of the Humanities)

6. Members of the Allen County Collaborative Group, IN, shared materials on foreign languages and careers. Seven members of the local business community spoke and led a lively discussion with members.

Have Alliances Received Outside Funding?

While new academic alliances of foreign language professionals continue to develop, more established alliances have begun to formulate plans for their own ambitious projects—projects that require outside funding. Because colleges, universities, and other postsecondary schools are the only educational institutions that can legally administer grant monies from public granting agencies and private foundations, it is very important that alliances made up of elementary and secondary school faculty establish a "college connection," so they may receive funding to implement their own unique projects.

Foreign languages and literatures alliances have received funding from federal and state programs as well as from private foundations. A selection of examples from each category includes:

- Northern Arizona Collaborative**, Northern Arizona University, Pat Cummins, Project Director; \$57,000 from U.S. Department of Education, Critical Languages Program for "Critical Languages and the Non-traditional Student" (1985).

- Collaboratives at California State University**, Stanislaus and the University of the Pacific, Stockton, Linda Bunney-Sarhad, Michael Fuller, and Robert Kreiter, Project Directors; \$80,000 from U.S. Department of Education, Critical Foreign Languages Program for a project to improve and expand regional critical foreign language teaching and promote articulation at all levels of instruction (1986-87).

- Ohio Valley Foreign Language Alliance**, Ohio University, Barry Thomas, Project Director; \$40,000 from the Ohio Board of Regents to encourage student interest in foreign languages and cultures and to establish resource centers at three postsecondary institutions (1986-87).

•**Northern New Jersey Foreign Language Collaborative**, William Paterson College, Angela Aguirre, Project Director for 1985-86, JoAnn Sainz, Project Director 1986-87; consecutive grants totaling over \$65,000 from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education for series of free lectures for area foreign language teachers by prominent members of the profession.

•**Southeast Georgia Collaborative, Georgia Southern College**, Clara Krug, Project Director; \$8,967 from the Georgia Endowment for the Humanities, and matching funds from the university to create a state network of academic alliances in Georgia (1985).

•**Wake County Collaborative, North Carolina State University**, Raleigh, Arlene Maninowski, Mark Sosower, Project Directors; \$11,439 in grants from the North Carolina Humanities Committee and matching funds from the university for "Collaborating in the Humanities Through the Study of Poetic Imagination and Its Images." This project is creating a state network of alliances in North Carolina (1986-87).

•**Ohio Valley Foreign Language Alliances, Ohio University**, Lois Vines, Project Director; \$5,340 for 1986 and a similar amount for 1987 from the Martha Holding Jennings Foundation for "Teachers Helping Teachers," a project which has brought teachers of English from France and Spain to Ohio for immersion experiences with local teachers of French and Spanish. The university also supplied funds for this project.

These are but a few of the grants received by alliances. Copies of successfully funded proposals submitted by foreign language collaboratives may be obtained from the national office at Marymount College in Tarrytown, NY.

How Does One Start an Academic Alliance in Foreign Languages and Literatures?

1. *Identify interested faculty.* Teachers in the schools or those in colleges may begin the process. Administrators may also initiate groups.

2. *Establish a steering committee* including representatives of all public and private educational institutions of all levels offering foreign language study in the area. Postsecondary faculty should not dominate the committee; those who specialize in pedagogy and language study as well as those interested in literature and/or research should be members.

3. *Establish the collaborative group.* The steering committee may want to make a founding statement in which they:

- define the geographic area to be served by the group;
- suggest initial goals;
- prepare a statement of major issues of concern to local foreign language and literature faculty;
- suggest specific incentives to encourage faculty participation in the group. (A number of school districts have granted in-service continuing education credits to teachers who attend alliance meetings; some school and college faculty have received release time.)

The steering committee may send copies of the statement to local administrators in the schools, community colleges, and universities, for administrative support and encouragement in the collaborative effort is crucial.

4. *Hold meetings.* The first meeting should occur at a centrally located site. Groups have held meetings at member schools; others have chosen a local hotel or restaurant to provide a relaxing ambiance.

After introducing the concept of collaboration, the steering committee should open discussion up to the entire group as it begins to decide which concerns it hopes to address at the local level. Following this discussion, the members may discuss and determine the date, time, location, and agenda of the next meeting, followed by an election of officers.

What is the Role of Administrators?

Participation of administrators can be crucial to the success of an academic alliance in foreign languages and literatures. Administrators can provide meeting places, as well as limited supplies, services, and financial assistance. Most important, they can provide incentives for members' participation. Depending on the requirements of state school systems and the wishes of alliance members, administrators may authorize school teachers to obtain continuing education credit for teacher recertification or release time from hall or bus duty, for example. On the college level, administrators can provide supplies and postage and arrange and pay for clerical help. They may also arrange for release time and credit toward promotion and tenure in the categories of teaching and professional development.

In any event, individual educators contemplating forming an alliance should make every attempt to include administrators in the planning stage in order to obtain their needed support and encouragement.

Resources

Dr. Ellen Silber, Head of the central office of Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures is eager to help those faculty interested in starting an alliance. She may be contacted at Marymount College, Tarrytown, NY 10581, (914) 332-4917 or (914) 631-3200 Ext. 382 or 427. Dr. Silber and her staff are ready to:

- provide materials and consultant support to interested teachers and administrators on how to start and sustain an alliance.
- provide speakers for new groups at their opening meeting.
- arrange communication between new alliances and successful on-going groups.
- facilitate communication among all foreign language collaboratives through the Academic Alliance column in *Foreign Language Annals* and the project's own triannual newsletter, *Collaborare*.
- arrange academic credit and professional recognition.

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